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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 LAGOS 000076

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/25/2016

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: ISRAELI MILITARY TRAINS, EQUIPS JTF IN RIVERS

Classified By: Consul General Donna M. Blair for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Magnus Abe (protect throughout), Secretary to the State Government of Rivers State, told Pol-Econ Chief January 17 that Governor Amaechi had succeeded in pushing the military into buying helicopters, gunboats and other equipment for the Joint Task Force (JTF); as a result of military activity, life has returned almost to normal in Port Harcourt, Abe said. The Israeli military is equipping and training the JTF, including with remote aerial surveillance systems, according to Abe. Neither the Niger Delta Ministry nor the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) has been adequately funded in the federal government budget, resulting in a great deal of anger among Niger Deltans, Abe reported. In Abe's opinion, the President will not do anything for the Niger Delta, because to do so he would have to take money out of the hands of the other states, and stand up to Nigeria's "rapacious elites." According to Abe, Rivers State recognizes the complicity of the JTF in illegal bunkering, and now orders the JTF to reduce by half amounts of illegally bunkered oil coming out of the creeks, as a way to reduce company losses. (Note: Abe's account neither explains how this mechanism helps the company from which the oil is stolen to reduce its losses, nor what happens to the other half of the stolen oil. End Note) The Rivers State Sustainable Development Program is being run by Shell, and has established microfinance programs, loan programs for bus and taxi service providers, health centers and subsidized health care in each local government area (LGA) as well as built roads. Cancer rates are rising in the Niger Delta, Abe observed. We are unable to confirm some of Abe's claims, particularly those related to the JTF's newly acquired security equipment. However, both his prediction that the President will do nothing to resolve the crisis in the Niger Delta, and his observation that Niger Delta indigenes are increasingly angry at that failure, are echoed by many of our interlocutors. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Pol-Econ Chief met January 17 with Rivers State Secretary to the State Government (SSG) Magnus Abe. Abe stated that in October of 2007, when Governor Amaechi took office, the JTF had had no functioning helicopters, nor armored personnel carriers, and only two functioning gunboats. Governor Amaechi provided the Joint Task force with 140 vehicles, and actively lobbied the Federal Government to provide additional equipment. The JTF now has 20-30 functioning gunboats, two helicopters and other equipment. As a result, life in Port Harcourt, which had been overrun by criminals, is almost back to normal and crime has again become an unattractive proposition, Abe said.

Business transactions in Nigeria are especially vulnerable to criminal activities, because the banks don't function the way they do in the developed world; in Nigeria, everyone moves large amounts of cash, and the criminals are after people who are connected to or have access to that money, he said.

13. (C) With the improvement in security, there are currently over 700 British nationals in Port Harcourt, and the French "never left", Abe alleged. British and French Consulate personnel "travel to Port Harcourt all the time". Air France is considering regular flights to Port Harcourt, according to Abe. (Note: Pol-Econ Chief spoke with French Consul General Jean Luc Bodin February 19. Bodin confirmed that the Government of France never warned its citizens against travel to the Niger Delta, and noted that from 500-600 French nationals continue to reside in Port Harcourt.

Air France flies into the Port Harcourt international airport from Paris four times per week, and hopes to increase the frequency of flights to one a day, Bodin said. Bodin travels to the region "from time to time", but another Consulate staff person, a French citizen, travels to Port Harcourt weekly on Consulate business. In a January 20 conversation, David Harries, Consul, British Deputy High Commission in Lagos, told Pol-Econ Chief that the U.K. continues to warn its citizens against travel to the Niger Delta. He said that he had traveled twice in the last half year to the Niger Delta, once to Port Harcourt in September 2008, and a second time in January. He confirmed that there are 676 registered British nationals living in Port Harcourt, 65 living in Warri, Delta State, and 2 in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. End Note)

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Israeli Military Training, Equipping JTF

14. (C) The JTF has been collaborating with the Israeli military, which has been providing equipment and training, according to Abe. The equipment provided includes a surveillance device that Abe called "a camera on a balloon," which allows the JTF remotely to scan the area with a certain radius. This is particularly important when threats have been received by telephone, Abe noted. It would be fine if kidnappers or other criminals could be easily captured and arrested, but when they start shooting, the JTF shoots back. The killing that takes place sounds wanton, callous, he said, unless the person kidnapped is your own child.

15. (C) Fara Dagogo and Ateke Tom are not putting their own lives at risk, he said. Their networks sell oil and get police protection. Students used to go to the camps for three months during their vacations so that they could earn money. They would earn 50,000 naira (USD 357 at the current rate of exchange 140 naira/USD 1.00), for a total of 150,000 naira (USD 1,071) for a three month period. Now, however, with the JTF pressing them, the job is no longer glamorous but dangerous, and society is mobilized to call them criminals, Abe stated. The Elem Tombia community that was razed is now being developed, Abe alleged. The JTF has taken up a position there, people are returning and the schools and churches are open and functioning. (Note: We have been unable to obtain independent information with which to verify this claim. End Note) The criminals themselves have moved away from the area, Abe said.

Anger at Failure to Fund New Ministry, NDDC

16. (C) While the Governor may have been able to push the military into buying new equipment, he has not been able to influence the federal government to allocate more funds to the Niger Delta, Abe said. Neither the Niger Delta Ministry nor the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) has been adequately funded in the federal budget, and there is a great deal of anger among the people of the region; Nigeria's leaders are extremely insensitive to the equity issue, Abe

said. Unfortunately, the people's anger has led to violence that has boomeranged and impacted on the people themselves, according to Abe. Abe said he doubted that the President will do anything for the Niger Delta; to do so, he would have to take funds out of the hands of the other states.

¶17. (C) The country is in the hands of a "rapacious elite," Abe said, and it would be legitimate for the masses to rise. Of the 500 people he sees every Tuesday and Thursday in his office, they all want the same thing: inflated contracts. He asks them: do you want me to steal, and the response is invariably "yes." Abe said he tells them: Think about the person whose child has malaria, whose wife needs a caesarian; that is what the money will be spent for. To make change, Abe said, a leader must confront the ruling class. In a few cases, such as that of Governor Amaechi, who fell out with his godfather, or Adams Oshiomhole, who managed to get by without one, they will be able to make some progress, but will have to watch their backs, he said. There are no constituents in Nigeria, only godfathers, Abe stressed.

Rivers Tells JTF How Much It Can Illegally Bunker

¶18. (C) Illegal bunkering involves tremendous amounts of money, and the operations of international criminal groups, Abe said. Rivers State has been able to gain a modicum of control over the illegal bunkering, Abe noted, by recognizing the connivance between the criminals and the military. As a result, when Shell calls to say that the company has lost 10,000 barrels of oil, Rivers State now calls the JTF officers in charge of that portion of the territory, and orders that the amount of oil coming out of the creeks be reduced by half. In this fashion, the State is trying to control international oil company losses sector by sector, Abe contended. (Comment: Abe's account neither explains how

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this mechanism helps the company from which the oil is stolen to reduce its losses, nor what happens to the other half of the stolen oil. End Note)

RSSDP Guided By Board of International Partners

¶19. (C) The Rivers State Sustainable Development Program (RSSDP) is being run by Shell and guided by a board composed of international development partners, including the World Bank. More than 300 youths have been sent abroad to study. The State has constructed 250 schools pursuant to the program, Abe said.

Micro-Finance Programs Operating

¶10. (C) A law establishing micro-finance systems has been passed, and 600 million naira (USD 4.28 million) has been distributed to individuals through the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Abe noted. The program must be self-sustaining, Abe said; if the loans are not repaid, the State will not replenish the funds. To assure that the people who get the loans use them well, the RSSDP is also conducting entrepreneurship training via the local government areas (LGAs). The State has also given two billion naira (USD 14.3 million) to the Rivers State microfinance institution in partnership with First City Monument Bank. Three or four microfinance banks have already been prequalified. Before granting loans, they will provide training in elementary bookkeeping and other skills. That will assure that they will be able to pay back and keep the fund self-sustaining, Abe stated.

¶11. (C) To improve safety, Port Harcourt has banned okadas (motorcycle taxis) in the city. To assure that there is sufficient low-cost transportation available, the RSSDP has

entered into a partnership with Skye Bank to arrange loans for the purchase of taxis and busses. The cost is approximately 300,000 naira (2,000 USD) for which the new owners pay 15,000 naira (USD 100) per week until the vehicle is paid for. Not enough new busses have as yet been purchased to serve all the people, he said, but there are plenty of other vehicles on the road to take up the slack. (Comment: Other interlocutors, Port Harcourt indigenes who actually rely upon okadas and busses for transport, say that the majority of the vehicles purchased with the loans have been placed in service, not as taxis, but as private vehicles. They also report that there is widespread suspicion that the loans were available only to cronies of politicians. End Comment.)

Health Centers Established

¶12. (C) The RSSDP has established 160 health centers, five in each LGA, Abe claimed. In the past, clinics were not more than rooms, without equipment or medicines. Now each health center is not only staffed by a doctor and two nurses, it is equipped with an operating theater and an ambulance. Flats have been provided so that the doctor and nurses can live close to the clinic, said Abe. Treatment is free only for children under six and for adults over 60, but the state provides a subsidy of almost 30 billion naira (USD 214 million) to assure that the quality of care provided is high.

Roads Under Construction

¶13. (C) The Federal Government has not funded one road in the key Niger Delta States in the last ten years, Abe alleged. The Bayelsa to Bonny road was promised by Federal Government but never funded. Rivers State has begun construction of the Port Harcourt Ring Road, which will cost one billion naira (USD 7.14 million). The Chinese will build the six lane highway, as well as the three bridges needed to link parts of the city, which will reduce the need for boat transportation by approximately 90 percent, Abe said.

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Cancer Rates On the Rise

¶14. (C) Abe expressed concern that cancer rates in the Niger Delta are on the rise. Based on the number of people he knows who have cancer, the incidence of cancer has increased dramatically in the last several years. Abe said he had just heard that Presidential Advisor Oronto Douglas was suffering from stomach cancer (Note: A story about Douglas' battle with cancer, appeared that day in the Vanguard. Dr. Edit Ikpi, Commissioner for Health of Cross River State, has also told Pol-Econ Chief of his concern about the rising rates of cancer he saw while in private practice. End Note)

¶15. (C) Comment: We are unable to confirm some of Abe's claims, particularly those that relate to the security equipment acquired by the JTF. However, both his prediction that the President will do nothing to resolve the crisis in the Niger Delta, and his observation that Niger Delta indigenes are increasingly angry at that failure, are echoed by many of our interlocutors.

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